

Testimony of Mrs. Dorothy Elizabeth Tucker, Medford, MA

**United States House of Representatives
Energy and Commerce Committee
Energy and Air Quality Subcommittee**

**“Natural Gas and Heating Oil for American Homes”
November 2, 2005**

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony with you this afternoon. It is an honor for me to be here. I want to thank Congressman Edward Markey for inviting me to this hearing and I want to thank Mr. Dan O’Leary from Mystic Valley Elder Services in Malden, Massachusetts for coming to Washington with me today.

My name is Dorothy Elizabeth Tucker and my friends call me Dorothy Elizabeth. I am 83 years old and I live in Medford, Massachusetts. I went to public schools and graduated from Boston University. The majority of my working life was with the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health and the Massachusetts Department of Mental Retardation until I retired at age 65. I am a divorced mother who has two wonderful children and I live alone in my home in Medford.

I want to share with you what it is like to be a senior citizen living on a fixed income as winter approaches and my heating bills are going up. While I might not be considered low income from the government’s perspective, I must still make difficult choices when it comes to heating my home, taking my medicines, paying my property taxes and living my life. For many of my friends and acquaintances, the choices are even more severe. And if the price of oil keeps going up, my choices will be severe as well.

I am on a payment plan with my oil company. In October, my bill increased from \$400 per month to now \$580 a month. That's \$180 per month more I will be paying. I keep my heat low, but I know I have to keep it on so that my pipes don't freeze. I've spent a lot of time figuring out where the warmest part of my house is, and it's a room on the second floor because, as you know, heat rises. When it gets colder, that is where I will spend all of my time. I have a sofa in that room and I prepare my meals in the kitchen and bring them up to the second floor. My bedroom is a little colder, but that's okay.

I've also been planning on changing the way I manage my medications. Right now, I have one pill I'm supposed to take once a week. My plan is to take it 3 times a month instead. On Monday one week, Wednesday the next week, and Friday the next week. That way, I can stretch it out.

A few years ago when my car broke down, I decided I couldn't afford to fix it and that I would try to get along without it to save money. I still get around pretty well, so that is working out for now.

I have many friends who could use the local food pantry, but don't because they are embarrassed to need the help. Sometimes they go and say it's for one of their children. More often, they use the senior meals program in town to stretch their food budget. While we struggle, we also want to maintain our independence and our dignity.

I think things are going to be pretty tough this winter. I guess if I had one message for Congress, from me and my friends, as you consider these issues, it is that I just think it is totally unfair for people who have worked so hard all their lives to receive so little at the end of their lives. We just can't see why it is necessary for us to live this way. We know that people are making money off of us while we are struggling and we don't like it one bit.

I do hope that my observations are helpful to all of you in Congress as you work on these important issues. I hope that you will be able fund the fuel assistance program at a level that will allow us to heat our homes enough so that we will be able to safely live in them throughout this winter and in the years to come. Thank you again for inviting me to share my story.